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Phony death notice linked to spy scandal

By Ed Lion
United Press International

LONDON — Scotland Yard confirmed yesterday that it was investigating whether East German spies in Britain had been warned to flee the country by a bogus death notice placed in a London newspaper.

The notice appeared last Saturday in the Times of London. It announced the deaths of three "dearly beloved sons" of German Countess Margarita von Hessen and the late Count Richardt in Cornwall on Britain's west coast.

However, police said no such deaths were recorded, and West German officials could find no trace of any such countess. Officials speculated that the notice might have been placed as a coded warning to East

German spies.

The worst spy scandal in years — with the defection of one of Bonn's top counterintelligence officers and the arrests of other spy suspects in Bonn, London and Switzerland — has rocked West Germany this month.

A woman identified as Rita Coleman reportedly said Thursday that she had taken out the 33-word death notice as a favor to an acquaintance who has since disappeared.

A spokesman for Scotland Yard confirmed that the woman had been interviewed by its Special Branch detectives, but he refused to elaborate.

"We are assessing what was said in the interview but cannot discuss this any further at all," the spokesman

said.

Sources, however, said agents from MI5, Britain's domestic intelligence office, also quizzed Coleman.

Coleman was quoted by the Sun newspaper yesterday as saying that she was no spy and that Scotland Yard told her she was not suspected of any wrongdoing.

She said she placed the notice for the "countess" — an acquaintance she had first met over the phone through charity work and who phoned her "from time to time." She said that she did not know whether the woman had a permanent address or how to reach her.

Last week the woman phoned and said that her children had died, Coleman said. The woman said that she was flying back to West Germany

and asked for a notice to be placed in the Times as a favor, Coleman said.

"She was very distressed," Coleman told the newspaper. "I thought it was strange at the time but I didn't think of checking to see whether the deaths had taken place.

West German government sources said the possibility of a newspaper warning to spies "cannot be excluded."

The Times said it normally takes death notices over the phone without requiring a death certificate and, because Coleman's credit-card payment for the notice went through, there were no suspicions.

"I think such a warning has been suggested in novels, but we're not speculating on why it was placed," a Times spokesman said.

NEW YORK TIMES
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'Inner-German' Ties And U.S. Interests

By R. G. Livingston

WASHINGTON — When Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany comes to New York next week for consultation on the summit meeting, he hopes also to meet privately with President Reagan. The two leaders should not miss this opportunity to discuss West Germany's expanding relationship with East Germany. For far too long, Washington and Bonn have failed to discuss the consequences for their alliance of these developing "inner-German" ties.

The relationship came into sharp focus in recent months in a somewhat paradoxical manner with the discovery of more than 10 East German spies in sensitive positions in West Germany. Among those uncovered were secretaries in the offices of the Chancellor, the President and the Economics Minister, as well as the chief of counterespionage against East Germany. Once again, as in 1974 when discovery of a spy in Willy Brandt's entourage led the Chancellor to resign, West Germany has demonstrated its particular vulnerability to infiltration from the East.

Yes, the reaction in Bonn has only highlighted the strength of its relationship with East Germany. Across the political spectrum, West German leaders are making one point plain: Embarrassing and costly as these breaches may be for the country's security, they will not be allowed to damage relations with its eastern neighbor.

Conservative Franz Josef Strauss

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A key issue for Kohl and Reagan

and leftist Willy Brandt alike proceeded with visits to the East. Mr. Kohl refused to fire the minister responsible for the espionage disaster. Even as the scandal was unfolding, the Chancellor stood up in the Bundestag, to cite "considerable improvement" of relations with East Germany as one of his main successes.

The two Germans have clearly decided that no political event, in Europe or outside it, will be permitted to disturb their relationship. It has, after all, survived martial law in Poland and new Soviet and American intermediate-range missiles in Europe, as well as the Bonn spy scandal.

Deutschlandpolitik — the policy of improving relations — was conceived by Willy Brandt in the 1960's but intensified and broadened by his successors. What began with trade, finance and politics will soon involve sports, cultural and academic exchanges. A rare and highly valued outlet for German patriotism, it is exceedingly popular among leaders and voters of every party. And it continues to improve: An unprecedented visit to West Germany by the East German leader, Erich Honecker, seems likely before next summer.

What does the relationship mean for the United States? West German politicians insist that it is fully compatible with membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This may be true,

but Deutschlandpolitik is not without risks for West Germany's allies — risks linked mainly to the policy's popularity among voters and the way that political parties compete to outdo each other in pursuing it. What Mr. Kohl needs to explain to Mr. Reagan is just how this competition affects the alliance.

The President might, for example, be interested in why Bonn muffled

criticism of the opposition Social Democrats' negotiations with East Germany about banning chemical weapons and creating a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe. He might also wonder about the great secrecy with which West German politicians arrange new credits and other good deals for East Berlin.

The Administration must not seek to check Deutschlandpolitik, but it has every right, as it has requested in recent years, to be better informed about that policy. The West Germans, for their part, should recognize that their increasing closeness to East Germany will inevitably raise questions about their NATO membership, encouraging American mistrust. Call their policy "inner-German" if they will, the West Germans cannot ignore that its consequences are international.

The political stakes are high and, as the spy scandal well demonstrated, so are the risks. As long as the United States remains allied with West Germany, it shares those risks. In these circumstances, Bonn must make a greater effort to cut Washington into the game, which may after all eventually alter the Europe we have known since World War II. □